

Critical text by Martina Cavallarin

Each epoch makes reference to precise structural and historical matrices corresponding to cultural forms that can be in part organised, closed or open.

“ ... to be inside a thing and see it from the outside, the concave sensation and the convex sensation, to be spatial as to be objective, penetration and contemplation, these repeat themselves in so many antitheses of experience and linguistic images, that it is reasonable to suppose that at the origin there was an ancient dualistic form of human experience.” (Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*).

Experiencing this difference through Verdiana Patacchini's works of art is her existential and feverish way of giving back memories of Art History through a re-elaboration of ancient artistic practices using a contemporary approach. Sources must be found and elaborated until they become one's own, by way of side glances and by chewing them over with strong and trained jaws, to cross the threshold and the inevitability of the passing of time, to arrive to an announced and expressed language with rigour and fatalism at the same time. To maintain this game on the past, essentially a linguistic one and produce contemporary works must be the result of study, but it is born of the idea and of the obsession of the idea. Though the themes the artist confronts are imperfection, metamorphosis and our link to the earth, the materials she uses to express them are ancient and several: raw linen, ceramic, ink, oil, graffiti, Japanese raku, fire, stones taken from Umbrian quarries – her homeland – clay which has been baked and left in glazed cream that gives the work an unplannable veined effect and acrylic and ink on plastic as if there was a thin veil of paint restoring the equilibrium between the hand painted canvas and a printed image.

Verdiana Patacchini has that which Mannerists termed “*sprezzatura*”. From the verb *sprezzare*, derived from the Latin *expretiare* (*ex – pretium*, esteem), literally it means to despise and it is used in the sense of carrying out a task with exaggerated ease, in other words with nonchalance. However in Count Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* it is used to mean with the maximum of grace and often it is traced back to a semantic environment related to the Aristotelian concept of irony (*eroneia*). In Mannerism “*sprezzatura*” meant not only the idea – the idea of a simulated lightness that is the custodian of an image produced with apparent *aisance* while hiding labour and artifice – but obsession with the idea.

This Italian artist lives in New York. Her studio is located in MANA Contemporary, a community created in 2011 inside a decommissioned tobacco factory, in which different disciplines have endemically developed a concept of plural and truly participated cohabitation. In this reality so full of vitality Verdiana Patacchini often finds herself confronted with critical analyses that pigeonhole her art in a processuality with a strong Italian and European matrix, causing in her, at the same time, feelings of pride and perplexity. In fact her love for ancient statuary, primitive graffiti and Pompeian frescoes are the main touchstones of the artistic codex she has elaborated as her personal poetics whose temperature oscillates in a system of reverberations and resonances between lyric and surgical. The “bucranium” a decorative and symbolic image of a bull's skull, viewed frontally, was wide spread in Greek and Roman art in which, despite its disturbing qualities, it continued to reoccur. Often present as a phantom on the canvas, as Freud said, “disturbance is something from antiquity, which has always been with man, it just appears and disturbs.” In the artist's set of images the “bucranium” becomes a primitive symbol of femininity, representing the sexuality of a woman's womb, but also fecund and germinant maternity. In the artist's work there is an attempt to trick existence, to find an eternal

dimension to the fragility of experience and human existence. Instead as regards sculpture, over recent centuries this has been linked to evaluation criteria still based on virtuosity and professional skill but during the 1900s there was a shift to the "idea". When Arturo Martini, speaking of how his artistic language was suffering, states that "sculpture is a dead language", he had no way of hypothesizing the future, the trends of contemporary sculpture that now distinguish it, new approaches are filtered by an investigation of a mix of mediums joined with a knowledge of the past and references to and memories of it. And of irony. It is within this space along the border traversed by different languages in continual oscillation between temporality and atemporality that we find Verdiana's art. Her works are destined to remain within the time that fascinates her and has captured her: she has demagnetized the strip of Art History and tricked time into allowing it to float in the presence of the work.

The artist affirms the coherence of her plurality of languages with the installation of bidimensional tapestries with primitive and emblematic signs left free to float around the room, the solidity offered by three dimensional ceramic forms and the lines of the figures, pushing the limits but creating a harmony between the exhibition space and the time of the works. One device, the unexpected epiphany of a face created with white neon, elicits a path of research that reveals the identification of the signs of contemporaneity that only the Artist is able to grasp and give back through her vision. In fact Art History knows the sources of Verdiana's work, but what is born of the assembling of all these factors is something "forgotten from our memory" and restored to the present. The character of the individuals portrayed, people for whom the artist feels affection, penetrate freely into the work, becoming one of its fundamental elements together with an expansion of the error given the material's acting on the work's surface, independent as only the organism of a work can be.

The conceptual processuality that comes out when reading the Artist's work is a constant disassociation of the operating of lightness in solidity, the eddying of material that lies like tattooed skin, make up done with veins and lines, a shroud effect in reserve, an indispensable part to appearance and always a denial of original heaviness. The supports for the works are in iron and stone, materials that contain the essence of her desire to do art and do it in a precise way, the act of creation that suggests a resistance and an affirmation of its presence.

Pervasively elegant, her works, thanks to and notwithstanding their complexity and ingenuity in their formal relationship and the variety of materials, reach an extraordinary unity in their impact and liberating possibilities of expansion. These structures act on the spectator and spatial environment with great vigor. Endowed with a structural aesthetic and representative form, the works are charged with tension, illusionism, emphasis and irony. Classicizing design, technical skill, manual ability and gestuality, aspects of the obsession with artistic and cultural inclination as well as characterial attitude innate in all poetics. Her research is conceived as a project in which similarity is consciously accepted, to affirm the existences of differences, a place where things show their most innocent aspect and the allowing of a sign to express itself means affirming one's specific originality. Verdiana Patacchini has no intention of interrogating history through her works, though they are lucidly and clearly steeped in it, but rather the anthropologic nature of the collectivity, acting on the atavistic fears that constitute the primary node of existence, Time and Life. In this way her work constitutes a tautness versus the demand and balances of the world's varied reality using a precise individual verticalization.